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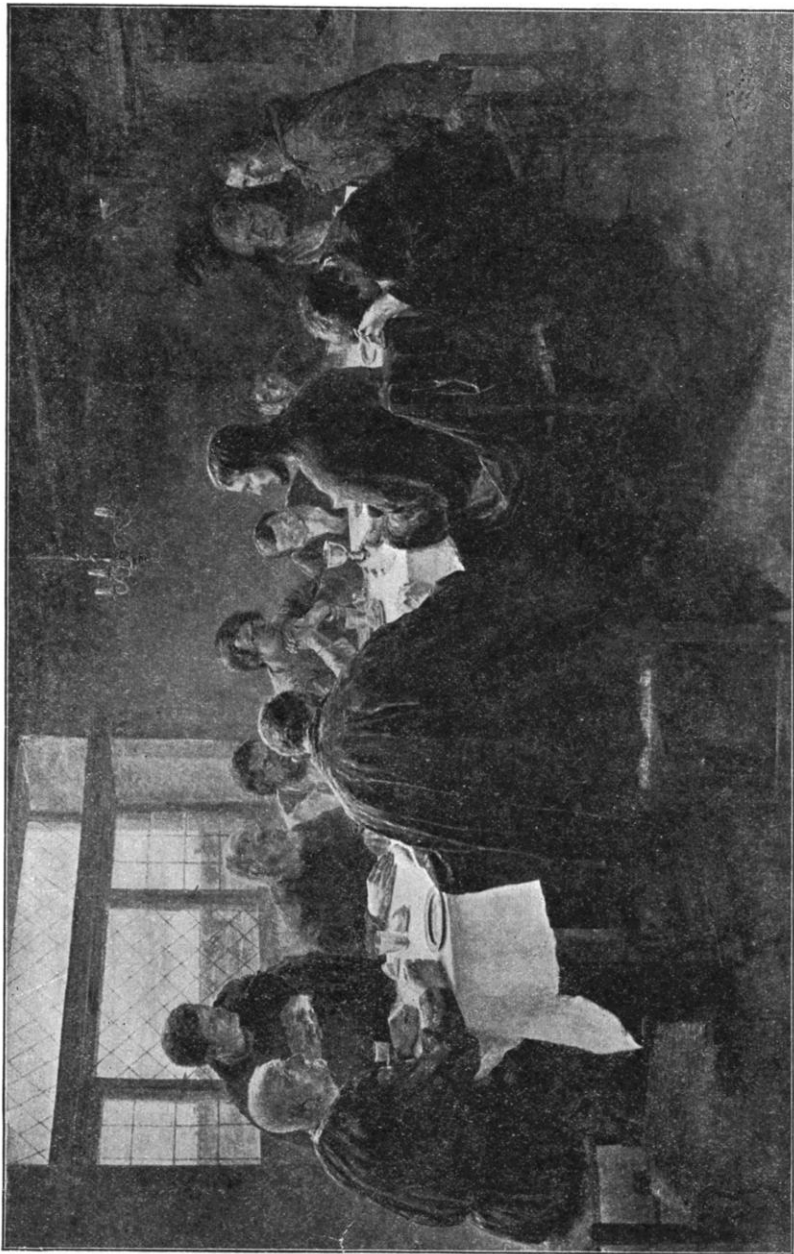
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THE BIBLE AS THE BOOK OF LIFE.

MUCH use was made by the Jews, in their thought and in their literature, of the idea of "the Book of Life." This phrase was in fact a metaphor taken from the courts of legal procedure, but the idea was doubtless conceived quite literally by the people. God had a book in which he recorded the names of all those righteous persons who were destined by him for future life. As we read in Psalm 69:28, "Let them be blotted out of the Book of Life, and not be written with the righteous" (similarly Isa. 4:3; Exod. 32:33; Mal. 3:16; Dan. 12:1). This conception, taken over from Judaism, was current also among the Christians. Paul speaks in Phil. 4:3 of those "whose names are in the Book of Life;" and the Revelation of John has frequent reference to the Book of Life, especially in the passage 20:12-15.

This Jewish idea has little vogue at the present time. We do not describe God so anthropomorphically, or picture heaven to ourselves in quite so earthly a way; so we do not think of God in heaven as a bookkeeper. However, the phrase "the Book of Life" is a valuable and significant one. With due recognition of the original Jewish and Christian usage, it will still be right and appropriate for us to use this phrase in a different sense. It is particularly applicable to the Bible as a Book which beyond all others imparts religious life to men. The Bible is the Book of Life. No other book is its equal. The Bible pre-eminently distinguishes the transient from that which abides. It reveals the deep meaning of life. It proclaims the reality of spiritual beings and spiritual ends in the universe. It bids men



THE LAST SUPPER.

—*Von Uhde.*

set their thoughts on things that are above. It brings men into communion and co-operation with God who is the author and perfecter of life.

One of Jesus' sayings which is most precious to us in the present day is that recorded in John 10:10, "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." There have been times in human history when life scarcely seemed worth the living, because men were shut down to mere existence, without the opportunity of living in the large sense. Where such conditions have existed in the past, or exist at the present, men hardly seek to live. But with the advancement of civilization life has become more attractive, the opportunities and the joys of living have increased. Men breathe the air of freedom and aspire to a better existence. There has come, therefore, a new sense of the worth and joy of living.

With this new experience the gospel is entirely in accord. It does not stand for repression of life, but for its expansion. It teaches men not to reduce themselves to the smallest dimensions, but to expand themselves to the largest. It points the way to fulness of life. Jesus' message is for the purpose of helping men to live in the truest way. We now see what is the goal of being; it is to realize the largest and best that is possible to us. To be the most and to do the most possible is the call of the twentieth century. And the Bible is pre-eminently fitted to assist men to this goal. It is therefore the Book of Life, because it is the book which can help us most in life.

The reason for this is not far to seek. The Bible itself originated in human life. Men of old experienced what it was to live, and found the secret of true living. The perplexing questions of existence which arise in our minds arose also in theirs. They sought an answer to the question: What is it to live? They found an answer which was largely true, and which they passed on to others for their good. They sought an interpretation of the events of life, large and small, as they came to them with the progress of individual and national history; and the interpretations at which they arrived were largely correct and helpful.

So there grew up a religious belief and a religious faith which became the chief comfort and guide of the lives of men. It was out of these personal experiences and the thoughts of men regarding them that the Bible grew.

No wonder, then, that the Bible is full of wisdom and power, if it records the life of men—and the life of those men who above all others were able to discover the aim of living and how it was to be attained. The Hebrew people were pre-eminently gifted with an insight into the profound problems of existence. Their minds reached out for the deeper meanings of individual and national experience. They tried to get beneath the surface of things, to learn the realities. So it resulted that their religious ideas were larger, higher, and truer than those of any other people. They acquired a knowledge of God beyond that of others. They saw the meaning of life more clearly. They grasped more perfectly the idea of how to live. The Bible is the record of these thoughts and experiences of the Hebrew people. From them supremely has come down to us the interpretation of life and the stimulus to true living.

Men are helped most by the lives of others. To come into contact with other persons with high ideals, aspirations, and strivings, is to find inspiration for one's own life. Imitation, as we now are told by psychological science, is one of the strongest factors in the process of human development. The Bible is particularly inspiring to us because it brings us into close relation with the lives of men and women who have been filled with high ideals, who have exerted themselves earnestly to be the most and do the most possible. To read of their lives is to impart to our own lives a powerful stimulus. We must admire their courage, wisdom, and devotion. What we admire we imitate. And so our lives tend to be transfigured into likeness with those who appeal to us as better than ourselves. The universal testimony of those who appreciate the Bible is that it does in a unique way inspire true life in men.

The Bible can, however, do more than simply inspire men to a higher life. That would be large in itself. But the Book is still

more useful in that it also directs men how to live. The men who wrote it had wrestled with this problem, and had reached for themselves certain great conclusions. They had found in what goodness consisted, and what was a real service for men to perform. They had found what strength might be obtained by faith and trust in God, and what comfort and help were available in a brotherhood of men. In a thousand ways—concrete ways—the Bible applies these general principles of living, and illustrates them so that one may learn how to think and act. He who would follow his highest ideals and make the most of himself will find the Bible an inexhaustible source of direction.

The first thought we have in these days is of the present. We, in some contrast with previous centuries, fix our chief attention upon the life that now is, feeling that this is the first consideration, and that to make the most of the present is the first duty. Further, the best guarantee of future well-being is to be and to do the best now. There can be no question that in this we are right, so long as we do not allow our thought and aspiration to stop with the present. There is a larger outlook to which we are entitled. There is an eternity behind us and before us, with reference to which we do well to live. The present existence is only intelligible as a stage in an eternal existence which reaches out ahead. We must live the present, not only with reference to itself, but with reference to the future; for the present has in it the making of the future.

The Bible gives us this larger perspective. It teaches us to live the part in the light of the whole. It is, of course, not required of us to take up with the specific eschatological ideas and expectations which characterized Judaism and primitive Christianity. Those ideas took form according to the specific political conditions of the time, and according to the modes of thought of the people. But it does behoove us to get the biblical conception of life in its widest aspects, and to set ourselves to achieve the life which Jesus so clearly described and lived. When we get his conception of life, with its vision of spiritual realities, its perfect love to God and fellow-men, its scale of values, its confidence and joy, we shall have gained a view of life which it must become our aim to realize within ourselves.